Testimony
Of

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(UCAN)

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Good Afternoon. Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak before you today.

My name is Steven Proctor. I am the Executive Director of the Utah Communications Agency Network (UCAN). I appear to today with the support of the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO), the nation's oldest and largest public safety communication organization. I personally have 35 years of service in this field, beginning as a public safety dispatcher during my college training, and serving in various positions to my current position. I have also been active on the national level. I am a past-president of APCO, served on several FCC advisory committees, and currently sit on the SAFECOM Program Executive Committee.

UCAN is a quasi-state agency set up by the Legislature for the purpose of establishing a statewide public safety communications network. We operate a public safety communications system within the borders of Utah serving 120 separate state, local and federal government agencies. The system supports 15,000 users. A board of directors made up of our users manages the system. That board represents the user base in making decision concerning system implementation, growth, maintenance, and expansion. They also set the budget, determine the rates, and contribute towards the system growth and enhancement. One of our directors said it best: "we pay for the privilege of governing ourselves". That is one of the keys to success of this agency.

Our system, in Utah, has experienced the acid test of providing interoperable communications. That came four years ago when we supported the 2002 Winter Olympic games. Not only were we responsible for public safety radio traffic; we also supported the communications requirements of the Olympic organizing committee managing the venue events. During the events, our system processed 10.5 million requests to talk, supporting just under 16,000 radios. There were no major system failures, network traffic issues or inability to communicate.

We are here to talk about interoperability. The experience I describe briefly above did not come without a focused effort. It took six years of hard work, political compromise, negotiations and wrangling before the system equipment order was ever signed. I hope as I briefly tell about how we got here some of those principles will aid you in assisting the public safety community to achieve this sometimes-illusive goal of being able to communicate with each other.

How Did We Get Here?

We identified a "Common Problem" which brought the stakeholders together. This was done without concern as to whether there would be a final product. It simply brought the potential users of a combined network together to get the issue on the table. A convener of stature brought us together—in this case it was our Governor.

A committed leader was appointed to broker the effort and focus on keeping the effort together. All meetings were held with openness, transparency and with voluntary participation. The effort utilized committed decision makers who came to the table to make commitments.

There was a set of clearly defined purposes and goals, a predicable management and maintenance process. A formal charter was developed: it outlined governance, outcomes, funding and levels of participation. Legislation was passed to memorialize and charter the effort for long-term results.

We recognized that this is not a problem with a one-time fix. It will require nurturing and management, because the problem is here to stay and will be come a part of a long-term organizational management process requiring ongoing resources.

After all these issues, directions and organizational efforts—then we talked about the money, and possible funding mechanisms.

So what does all this have to do with the Homeland Security Sub-Committee on Emergency Preparedness, Science and Technology?

Let me share with you the following:

It has been said that: "During times of emergency, people expect government at all levels to provide the appropriate response to mitigate disaster, save lives, provide support, help the needy and care for the injured. The major tool in providing that response is a communications system with reliable and dependable capabilities and capacity". There is simply no room for error. The communications system must rise to the occasion at a moments notice--and be prepared to sustain the highest degree of operability for whatever the duration of the situation will be—whether it is a multi-car freeway accident or a sustained attack on our country. It will then go back to supporting day-to-day traffic loading until the next emergency.

The citizens we serve expect in today's world of miraculous technology that this is what will take place. Sadly, in many instances it may not. While some areas of the county have progressed, many are still searching for answers.

Why is that so?

-The public safety market is a limited demand market with a focused product line. The equipment is costly to procure, install, maintain and upgrade. Typical public safety systems have to last a minimum of 10 years with many working well into thirty years. This makes it so difficult to overcome the technology curve. The system must be installed in protected hardened environments with redundant connections. It must be prepared to operate in the highest of demand. Because of its limited market presence, the cost of the individual units and the infrastructure is very high.

-A public safety system falls behind the "other needs of government". Roads, social services, police cars, fire equipment, staffing and training all take precedence over the expensive proposition of funding a public safety radio system. Many times when funding is set aside it comes from limited resources or one-time allotments. There never seems to be sustainable sources to keep the effort fully funded, progressing to a solution and fully maintained.

-There is a high degree of resistance from public safety agencies supported by age-old political barriers that create roadblocks in motivating agencies to work together and share a system and the associated costs. Cities, counties, states, and yes, federal agencies in some instances cannot find the common ground on which to chart the course and build a common communications infrastructure to support them all, giving the autonomy they need and the interoperability they desire, when it is needed. There is also reluctance between fire departments, police departments, and EMS providers to share resources and communications systems, because of the presumed loss of control.

-In multi-agency endeavors there is a reluctance of one governmental agency to spend its tax dollars supporting a system located across multiple jurisdictions because their agency should not have to pay to support services in another city or county. We have run into this problem with our own system when justifying expansion into areas to support state users.

Bringing agencies together requires a unique "governance" structure for operation, implementation and maintenance of the communications system. Many governmental agencies cannot or will not participate in these unique organizations.

So what can this Committee do to assist public safety to achieve this interoperable goal?
Take a leadership role and support the SAFECOM program. This program is the DHS effort to promote interoperability. They cannot do it without proper staff, funding and a direction and mission.

With appropriate resources, SAFECOM can and should staff up with state and local experienced personnel who have the background in communications to assist in the process. SAFECOM needs to be able to provide the resources to take the interoperability message nation wide. It should be able to host instructional seminars focused at state, local and federal partnerships to develop a dialogue among users and future partners. These forums will allow for the exchange of ideas and instructions to regions beginning interoperability projects. SAFECOM should develop resource tools for use by agencies such as case studies, how to guides, success stories available to those starting the interoperability process.

The federal government should also tie future federal funding to performance measures. Give priority attention to multi-agency, multi-discipline projects with long-term goals and reasonable chances to succeed with long-term results. Have the grant requests reviewed by peer groups who are familiar with successful projects before awards are made.

The government should reward innovative projects and highlight them at association events (APCO, IACP, IAFC), sending the message that funding is tied to cooperative efforts. Future investments of federal dollars must equal measurable results. Any grants must have a definable purpose and expected outcomes.

Congress should establish long term sustainable funding to support the public safety effort. This problem will not go away in a few years. It is a long-term commitment that will take continued to sustain and support.

Congress should also push, sustain and provide funding to motivate the standards efforts. The quicker manufacturers have a set of standards to build systems to, the quicker we have a larger selection of user devices (handheld and mobiles), and component infrastructure pieces the more effective and interoperable public safety systems.

I am quite sure these are points you have already listened to. However in actuality, they are the keys to success. While they are an important part of the process, this problem will not go away with more frequencies and more money. What is required is true leadership, vision, and bringing together of all the players and resources to make better operability and interoperability possible.

Thank you. I will gladly take any questions you might have.